It would be inaccurate to suggest that using illusion to construct identity is unique to Black gay reality. Everyone is capable of creating and employing illusion and fantasy for whatever purpose. An immediate example can be cited in a style of rap music known as "gangsta rap." The rapper boasts of being an outlaw, of having control and power, guns and money; again, things longed for by the disempowered. Glorifying urban terror in gangsta rap, or glorifying the American image of what success and beauty are and seeking to emulate that at gay balls; longing for a thick gold chain and a jeep or a thick strand of diamonds and a designer gown are not different longings in the context of Black reality. They are very much the same. In either instance they are longings from a place of disempowerment and their potential for causing self-destruction is vast. They are seductive longings, mutated dreams forged from the multitudinous oppressions constructing American society.

In *Paris Is Burning*, power remains almost exclusively defined in materialistic, Caucasian, and consumer terms. Many long to be rich and famous. Some long to be white and female, clearly an escapist longing, a longing that if realized would then place them in collusion with white supremacy—the primary source of their present disempowerment. They want to be stars in a world that barely wants to see them alive and thriving. They want *things* in a world that has caused more than a few of them to not want themselves.

The danger in illusion is that it doesn't remove the facts of racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic injustice—it may only temper or obscure them for the moment. Leaping through the looking glass is a risky escape from oppression and can result in an early death. As Octavia Saint Laurent says, "I don't want to end up an old drag queen with nothing going for me but trying to win grand prize at a ball."

Octavia is an attractive transsexual determined to be on the covers of fashion magazines. For her, drag balls are not

enough. She wants membership. She wants recognition. She wants privilege. She says, "Sometimes I sit and look at a magazine and I try to imagine myself on the front cover or even inside."

Some in this world are deluded by the imagined possibilities awaiting them beyond the ballroom approval of their peers. That some of the dreams they hold are sweetly scented and waft through the air like trails of silk is not surprising: the illusion for some is to be seductive and intriguing, to deflect and hold at bay the reality that does not tell them they are wanted and needed and desired. Dorian Corey, a professional drag queen and "elder" from the "old school," says of the power of illusion, "You erase all the mistakes, all the flaws, all the give-aways to make your illusion perfect."

Dorian provides a clarifying voice, succinctly explaining various aspects of ball life as he has seen it evolve over several decades. In his voice there is a willing acceptance of the life he has chosen for himself.

The camera visits him as he begins dressing for an evening, painting his face, taking his time, as though he has done this ten thousand times before and automatically assumes there will be applause when his drag is done. The small fame Dorian speaks of achieving in ball settings is perhaps just that in comparison with the enormous amount of wisdom and clarity he brings to *Paris*. He is an elder. He provides a blunt lucidness that is at once eloquent and even protective of his community.

It is Corey who comments on the influence of television on the illusions of younger ball walkers. Corey recalls a time when everyone wanted to look like movie stars as opposed to the present generation's obsession with emulating "Dynasty's" Alexis and Krystal and other soap opera divas. "When I grew up you wanted to look like Marlene Dietrich or Betty Grable. Unfortunately, I didn't know that I really wanted to look like Lena Horne. When I grew up Black stars